

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7145

INFO AMEMBASSY COTONOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 1612

LIMDIS

.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PFOR, DM, IV

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER USHER'S VIEWS ON BENIN'S BEHAVIOR
TOWARD AMBASSADOR ENGLE

1. IN VIEW OF FORTHCOMING MEETING OF ENTENTE CHIEFS OF STATE, I TOOK OCCASION OF MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ASRSENE USHER ASSOUAN ON FEBRUARY 17 TO FILL HIM IN ON EVENTS LEADING TO DEPARTMENT'S RECALL FOR CONSULTATION FROM COTONOU OF AMBASSADOR ENGLE. I ASKED HIM TO CONVEY THIS INFORMATION TO PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY.

2. FROM THE VARIOUS COMMENTS OF USHER AND OTHER LEADERS OF IVORY COAST IN THE PAST YEAR OR MORE, IT HAS BEEN CLEAR THAT THEY HAVE NO RESPECT FOR THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OF BENIN AND TEND TO DISCOUNT ITS ROLE IN AFRICAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. NEVERTHELESS IT REMAINS IN ENTENTE AND OTHER REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS. IT SEEMED TO ME, THEREFORE, THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR USHER AND PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET TO KNOW FROM US HOW AMBASSADOR ENGLE HAD BEEN TREATED, BEFORE THEY PICKED IT UP FROM THEIR OWN SOURCES AND PRESIDENT KEREKOU AT ENTENTE MEETING LATER THIS MONTH. (NOTE: IVORY COAST HAS NO DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN BENIN OR VICE VERSA. LAST YEAR WHEN THERE WERE REPORTS FROM COTONOU OF A COUP ATTEMPT, SENIOR IVORIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS CAME TO ME FOR NEWS OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING.)

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3. I DESCRIBED TO USHER OUR STRONG DISSATISFACTION WITH BENIN'S INTEMPERATE STATEMENTS AT 30TH UNGA AND THE LACK OF PROGRESS TOWARD COMPENSATION FOR NATIONALIZATION OF TWO U.S. FIRMS. I REFERRED TO AID LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS. I THEN TOLD HIM OF THE INDIGNITIES AMBASSADOR ENGLE HAD SUFFERED AT THE HANDS OF BENIN'S FOREIGN MINISTER AND PARTY OFFICIALS AND THE USG'S VIEW THAT SUCH TREATMENT HAD BEEN DISGRACEFUL. I CONCLUDED BY SAYING DEPARTMENT HAD RECALLED AMBASSADOR ENGLE FOR CONSULTATION AND ENGLE HAD ALREADY DEPARTED COTONOU.

4. USHER WAS IN FULL AGREEMENT THAT THIS HAD BEEN DISGRACEFUL BEHAVIOR, CONTRARY TO VIENNA CONVENTION, BUT NOT SURPRISING FOR THAT "SO-CALLED GOVERNMENT." HE THOUGHT WE HAD DONE EXACTLY THE RIGHT THING IN RECALLING ENGLE, TO MAKE OUR DISPLEASURE FULLY CLEAR. HE APPRECIATED THE BRIEFING AND PROMISED TO CONVEY IT TO PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET.

5. COMMENT: IT WILL BE RECALLED IN AF/W THAT IN APRIL 1974 WHEN DIORI WAS DEPOSED IN NIGER AND AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE HECK WAS PULLED BACK ON HIS WAY TO NIAMEY. THE DEPARTMENT ASKED ME TO GET PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET'S VIEWS ON THE TIMING OF OUR SENDING OUR AMBASSADOR OUT TO THE NEW GOVERNMENT. HOUPHOUET URGED US TO GO AHEAD AND WE DID. WHILE THE SITUATION IS DIFFERENT AND RELATIONS ARE POOR BETWEEN IVORY COAST AND BENIN, I WONDER WHETHER THE DEPARTMENT WOULD CONSIDER IT USEFUL FOR ME TO TAKE A SUBSEQUENT OCCASION TO RAISE WITH PRESIDENT HOUPHOUET THE QUESTION OF OUR CONTINUING RELATIONS WITH BENIN. DOES HE THINK IT WOULD SERVE A USEFUL PURPOSE TO KEEP OUR AMBASSADOR AWAY INDEFINITELY? SHOULD WE CONSIDER BREAKING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS? IT SEEMS TO ME THAT HOUPHOUET'S JUDGEMENT, WHILE OBVIOUSLY NOT GOVERNING A USG DECISION, MIGHT BE A FACTOR FOR THE DEPARTMENT TO CONSIDER. I DISCUSSED THIS IDEA IN JANUARY WITH AMBASSADOR ENGLE WHEN WE MET WITH DEPASSEC BLAKE IN LOME, AND AGAIN AT ABIDJAN AIRPORT ON FEBRUARY 15 WHEN ENGLE WAS EN ROUTE HOME. HE THOUGHT SUCH CONSULTATION WOULD BE USEFUL. SMITH

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